

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Natural Areas

A natural area is a site that contains one or more good- to excellent-quality natural community types that form a distinct geographical unit. A natural community is "a distinct and reoccurring assemblage of populations of plants, animals, bacteria, and fungi naturally associated with each other and their physical environment" (Schafale and Weakley 1990). Natural areas often contain rare plants and animals, as well. Natural areas are also referred to in this report as "sites" or "significant sites".

In a few cases, locations of rare plant or animal populations may merit protection where not present in high-quality natural communities. For example, a borrow pit or a powerline clearing would certainly not be considered as a "natural area", as these habitats are greatly impacted by humans. But, rare species can be present in such habitats because they often "mimic" rare natural habitats such as limesink ponds or savannas, and they are present in such altered places in Scotland County. These sites are included in this report and, combined with more natural sites, collectively all sites identified in this inventory are considered as "significant natural heritage areas". Thus, the addition of the word "heritage" indicates that a site or area has important natural heritage features (natural communities, rare plants, and/or rare animals), but is not necessarily a relatively undisturbed "natural area". Nonetheless, the phrase "natural area" is better understood by the public and is used in most of this report (e.g., in this heading and in the title of this inventory), though it must be emphasized that not all of the areas are completely natural.

This report also distinguishes between the nesting of sites within larger sites. Unless otherwise indicated, a site in this report is a "standard site" (see Figure 4). Such a site can range in size from less than an acre to thousands of acres. The NC NHP often groups collections of closely located standard sites into larger sites called "macrosites", and collections of macrosites in "megasites" (see Appendix). In this inventory report, collections of closely located, or similar, sites are grouped into a larger site called a "cluster" (see Figure 5), as such a grouping tends to differ slightly from what the NC NHP has delineated. (For example, all of the Scotland County portion of the Sandhills area is incorporated into one macrosite by NC NHP, as distinguished from another Sandhills macrosite west of US 1 in Richmond County.) The NC NHP's Lumber River Macrosite stops short (upstream) of where the Upper Lumber River Cluster is located in this inventory, which pulls the cluster upstream to Camp Mackall. The inventory also identifies and describes two large managed areas – Sandhills Game Land and Camp Mackall. They are not to be considered as clusters or as macrosites or megasites; rather, they are included to describe the overall significance of these publicly-owned lands, regardless of size, shape, or other features.

For a small county, Scotland County contains a large percentage of land within the boundaries of identified natural areas, thanks mainly to the Sandhills Game Land and to a lesser extent Camp Mackall. This inventory identifies a total of 31 standard sites in the county that contain